

Skimping on Sidewalks 2008

An Analysis of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Fatalities in New Jersey



Tri-State Transportation Campaign

July 2008

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Executive Summary

In 2007, 162 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed in New Jersey. This represents a 9 percent decline in the number of people killed while walking or bicycling from 2006. But this good news is overshadowed by New Jersey's inability to make sustained progress on reducing bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities. In early 1998, former Governor Whitman pledged to halve New Jersey's pedestrian fatalities from the 145 killed in 1997 by 2010. With only three years left, the state is nowhere near meeting that goal.

Within the state, Middlesex, Essex and Bergen counties were the most dangerous places to walk or bicycle, with 19, 18 and 15 fatalities respectively in 2007. Hudson, Bergen, Essex and Passaic counties had the highest share of total traffic fatalities who were pedestrians or cyclists.

Older New Jersey residents were more than twice as likely to be killed as a pedestrian in a traffic collision than the population as a whole. Though they comprised only 13.2 percent of New Jersey's population, people aged 65 and older made up more than 27.5 percent of the state's pedestrian fatalities.

New Jersey deserves credit for making bicycle and pedestrian projects a statewide transportation investment priority. Indeed, NJDOT has more than doubled bicycle and pedestrian spending over fiscal year 2005 levels.

Unfortunately, in the state's most recent capital program, funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects has fallen more than 14 percent from the previous year.

The state does appear to be enjoying an increase in walking rates, as measured by U.S. Census figures on commuting. The percentage of New Jersey commuters walking to work grew a whopping 26 percent from 2000 to 2006, compared to a 7 percent increase in walking nationwide. Still, only 3.5 percent of New Jersey commuters walk to work.

Even in the best years, municipal demand for bicycle and pedestrian funding has far exceeded the state's ability to support those types of projects. The number of applications outstripped NJDOT awards by a margin of almost 10-to-1. The state awarded just 6.4 percent of the total dollar amount requested by municipalities and other entities.

Key Findings

- More than 160 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed in New Jersey in 2007.
- Middlesex, Essex and Bergen counties were the most dangerous places to walk in the state.
- Older New Jerseyans were more than twice as likely to be killed as a pedestrian than the population as a whole.
- Walking rates grew by 26% from 2000 to 2006.
- Proposed fiscal year 2009 pedestrian and bicycle funding fell 14 percent from 2008 spending levels.
- Municipal demand for pedestrian and bicycle funding exceeds available monies by a margin of 10-to-1.
- Most pedestrian and bicycle funding goes to suburban municipalities rather than urban areas where the majority of pedestrian and cyclists injuries and deaths occur.

Beyond the shortfall in bicycle and pedestrian funding, the state's process for distributing those limited funds challenges municipalities without the staff to submit the complicated paperwork that is required or ability to provide local matching funds. With some notable exceptions, most of the pedestrian and bicycle funding that New Jersey administers (both federal and state) goes to projects in suburban areas. Urban municipalities, with transportation or planning staff that is already stretched thin meeting other obligations, have little time to devote to chasing down funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects, even as they tend to suffer from the highest concentration of pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and deaths.

Recommendations

- Use the next reauthorization of the Transportation Trust Fund as an opportunity to increase funding for pedestrian and bicycle programs.
- Target bicycle and pedestrian funding to places with the highest number of pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and deaths.
- Develop a new "Safe Streets for Seniors" funding program aimed at improving pedestrian safety in places with high numbers of older adults.

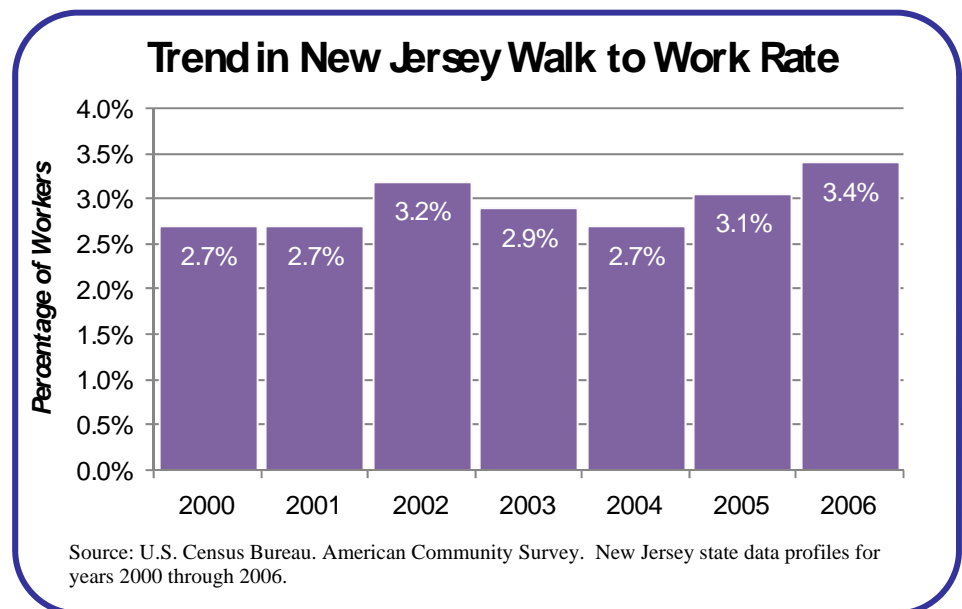
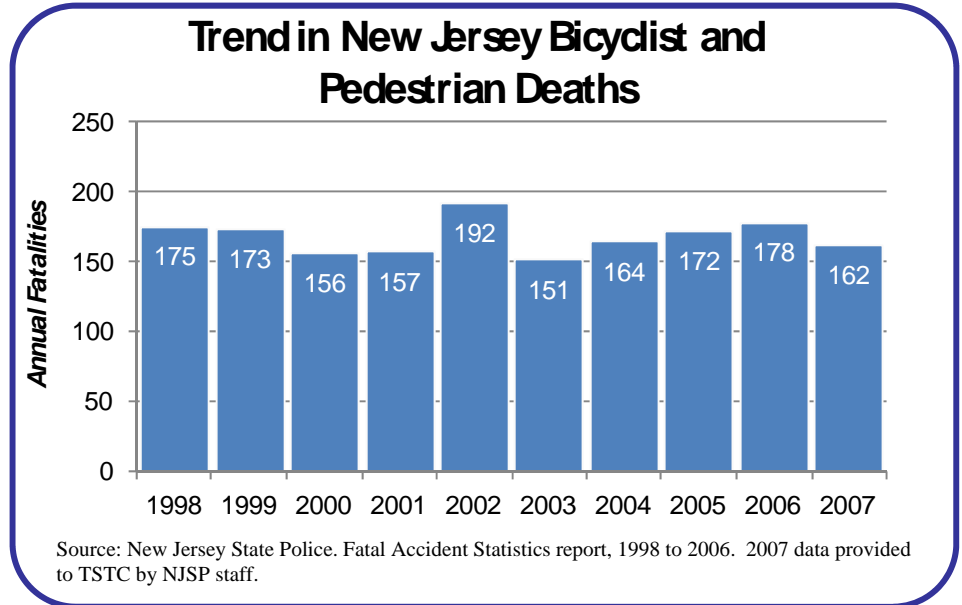
New Jersey Not Making Sustained Progress on Bicycle and Pedestrian Deaths

More than 160 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed in New Jersey last year. This was 16 fewer fatalities than in 2006, representing a 9 percent decline in bicyclist and pedestrian deaths.

Certainly, the drop in total fatalities is good news. But a review of the trend in fatalities over time shows that the Garden State has failed to make sustained and promised progress on reducing these tragic deaths. With only three years to go, the state will have a hard time meeting former Governor Whitman’s 1998 pledge to halve pedestrian fatalities by 2010 (145 pedestrians were killed in New Jersey in 1997).

In fact, pedestrian and bicyclist deaths have hovered between a low of 151 in 2003 and a high of 192 in 2002, averaging 168 annually over the last ten years. 2007 was among the safest years for bicyclists and pedestrians over the period, but that trend can be easily reversed, as reflected in the graph showing annual fatalities above.

New Jersey does appear to be enjoying a slight increase in walking rates, as measured by U.S. Census figures on commute modes. The percentage of workers who walked to work grew by 26 percent from 2.7 percent in 2000 to 3.4 percent in 2006 (figures for bicycling are not available). Nationwide, the share of commuters walking to work grew by only 7 percent from 2.4 percent in 2000 to 2.9 percent in 2006.



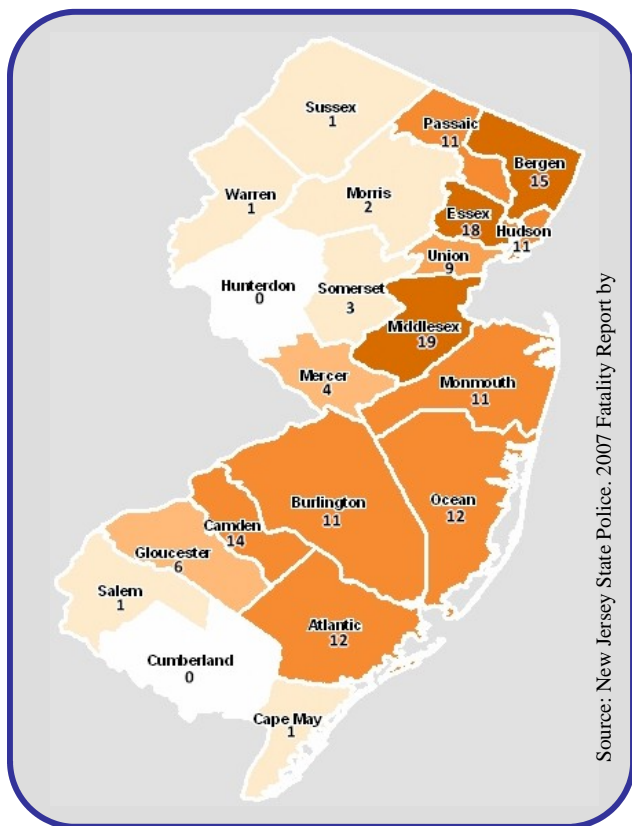
Pedestrian and Bicyclist Deaths Concentrated in Urban Counties

With 19 pedestrian and bicyclist deaths in 2007, Middlesex County ranked worst among New Jersey's 21 counties. Essex County ranked a close second with 18 fatalities, followed by Bergen County with 15 deaths.

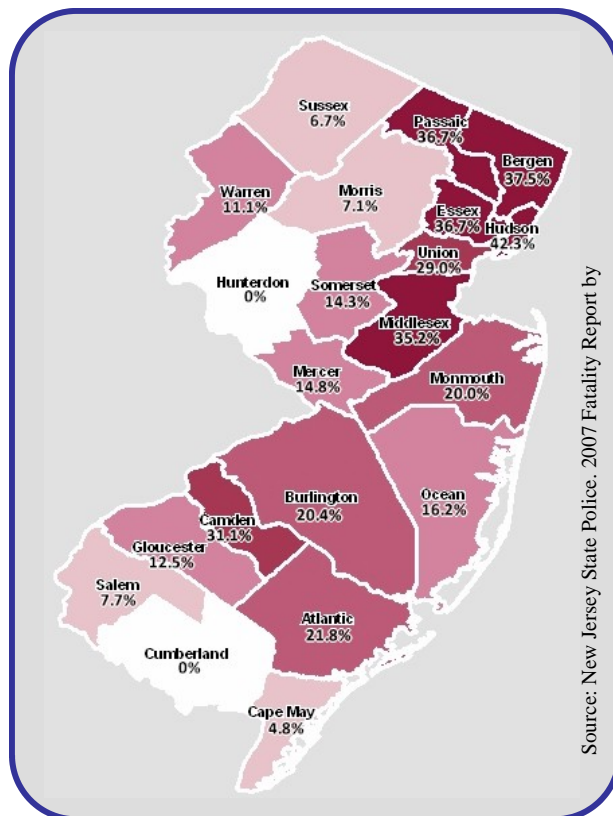
Year-to-year fluctuations in county pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities shift these annual rankings. But, for the most part, pedestrian and bicyclist deaths occur in New Jersey's more urbanized counties, with fewer bicyclist or pedestrian deaths in the state's sparsely-populated far southern and north-western counties.

Another way to evaluate the most dangerous areas for pedestrians and cyclists is to look at the percentage of total fatalities that those groups comprise. Once again, urban counties are more likely to see pedestrian and bicycle fatalities. Pedestrians and cyclists made up more than 42 percent of Hudson County's traffic deaths in 2007. In Bergen County 37.5 percent of traffic fatalities were cyclists or pedestrians. And in Essex and Passaic County, bicyclists and pedestrians comprised 36.7 percent of total traffic deaths. At 22.4 percent, New Jersey ranks far higher than the national average in terms of the percentage of crash fatalities who were pedestrians or cyclists, most likely because a greater share of New Jersey residents travel on foot or by bicycle than elsewhere in the country.

Total bicycle and pedestrian fatalities by County, 2007



Pedestrian & cyclist share of total traffic fatalities by County, 2007



Seniors Disproportionately Killed

Older New Jersey residents were more than twice as likely to be killed as a pedestrian than the population as a whole. In the ten years from 1998 to 2007, 417 New Jersey pedestrians aged 65 years or older were killed in traffic crashes. These older pedestrians represented 27.5 percent of all pedestrian fatalities, though that age cohort comprised only 13.2 percent of New Jersey's population. The per capita fatality rate for older New Jersey pedestrians was 3.72 deaths per 100,000 persons, compared to 1.79 statewide for all ages. The oldest pedestrians (75 years old and older) suffered from fatality rates of 4.62 per 100,000 capita, a rate more than two and a half times higher than the statewide average.

The higher fatality rate for older pedestrians can probably be attributed to four factors: 1) older pedestrians are less likely to survive a collision with a car or truck; 2) a higher proportion of older residents may have "retired" their car keys and are walking instead; 3) older pedestrians are less able to get out of the way of oncoming vehicles in their path; and, 4) existing pedestrian infrastructure, such as the duration of crosswalk signals, ignores the needs of older walkers.

New Jersey seniors appear to be at far greater risk of being killed as a pedestrian than the national average. Nationally, people over 65 years of age suffer from a pedestrian fatality rate of 2.93 per 100,000 (compared to 3.72 for New Jersey). Those aged 75 years and older have a pedestrian fatality rate of 3.66 per 100,000 (compared to 4.62 for New Jersey)

Age	Pedestrian Fatalities (1998-2007)	Percentage of Total	Percentage of Statewide Population	Fatality Rate per 100,000 Capita
0 - 4	31	2.0%	6.6%	0.56
5 - 9	31	2.0%	6.8%	0.53
10 - 14	37	2.4%	7.0%	0.62
15 - 19	71	4.7%	6.5%	1.28
20 - 24	73	4.8%	5.9%	1.45
25 - 44	407	26.8%	29.8%	1.61
45 - 64	441	29.1%	24.2%	2.14
65+ (inclusive of 75+ cohort)	417	27.5%	13.2%	3.72
75+	255	16.8%	6.5%	4.62
Statewide	1,517	100%	100%	1.79

Funding Slips for Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects

New Jersey has significantly boosted spending for bicycle and pedestrian projects in the last five years, from just over \$11 million in FY2005 to nearly \$30 million in the latest capital program.

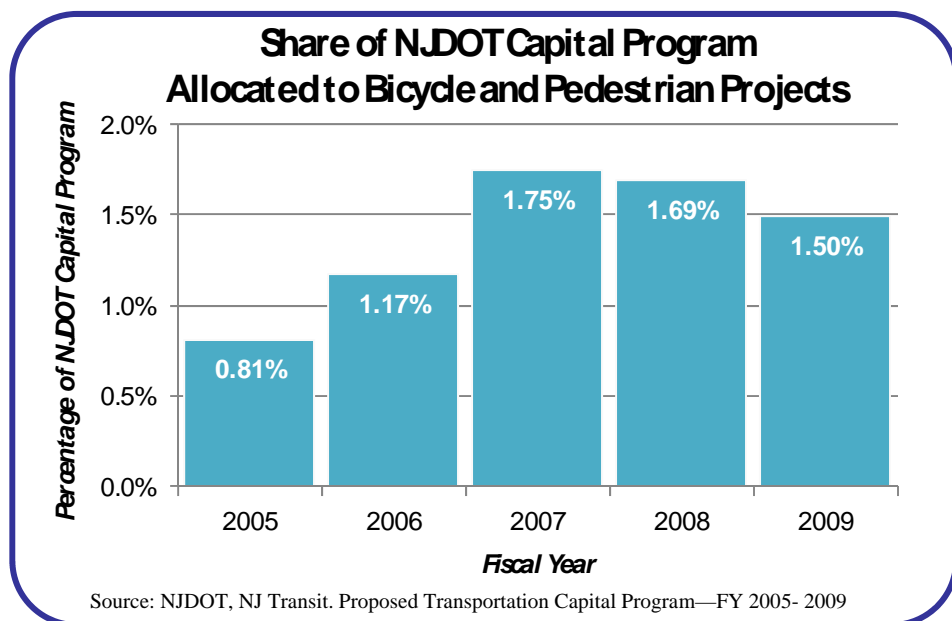
Governor Corzine and New Jersey Department of Transportation Commissioner Kris Kolluri deserve credit for continuing to make pedestrian and bicycle projects a transportation priority for the state. Building on New Jersey's solid foundation of support for walking and bicycling projects, Governor Corzine and Commissioner Kolluri launched a 5-year, \$74 million interagency initiative to improve pedestrian safety in September of 2006. The initiative utilizes improved data to target infrastructure improvements, enforcement and educational strategies to places with the highest number of pedestrian crashes.

The initiative created a \$50 million Pedestrian Safety Improvement Projects fund to construct new sidewalks and make other improvements over a five-year period. It also included a Pedestrian Safety Corridor Improvement program targeting infrastructure improvements along routes such as Newark's Ferry Street and Elizabeth's Route 27, and established a new Safe Streets to Transit program modeled after the popular Safe Routes to Schools program and intended to improve access to and from transit stops and stations. The initiative also incorporates improved pedestrian law enforcement, driver education, and pedestrian-oriented land use and transportation planning.

As a result of this initiative, New Jersey enjoyed a dramatic increase in pedestrian and bicycle spending beginning in FY2007. However, while funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects remains relatively high, the FY2009 capital program shows bicycle and pedestrian funding slipping somewhat from previous

years, both in absolute dollars and as a percentage of the total program. FY2009 funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is 14 percent lower than in FY2008, and the share of capital dollars dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian projects has fallen by just under 12 percent.

And, with the addition of new federal funds such as the Safe Routes to Schools program and the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), New Jersey appears to be slipping into a bad habit of de-



pendence on federal monies to support the state’s bicycling and walking goals. The state share of bicycle and pedestrian funding in the FY2009 capital program is only 26 percent, down sharply from more than 70 percent in the FY2005 program.

Municipal Demand for Funding Far Exceeds State Monies

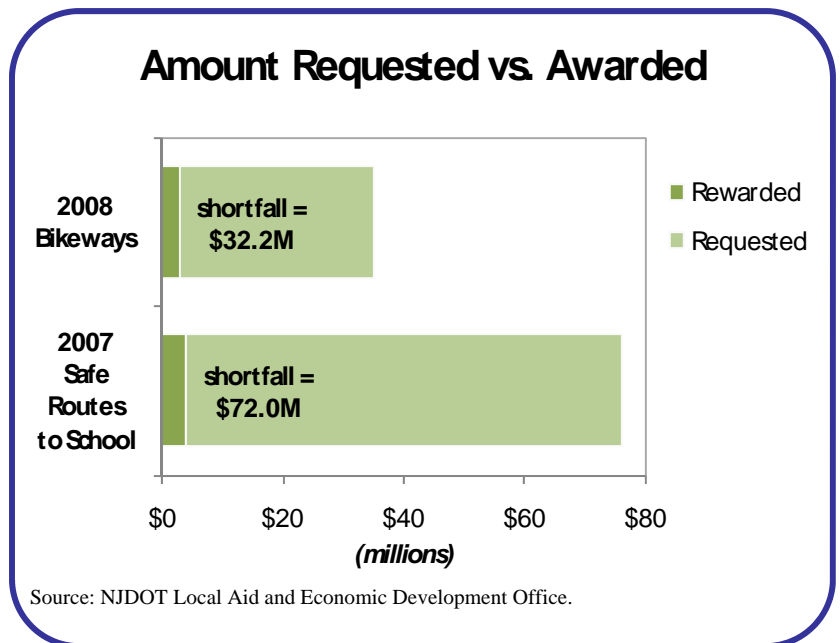
New Jersey’s spending of state and federal dollars on bicycle and pedestrian projects is greater than most other states. But the demand for bicycle and pedestrian funding has far outpaced New Jersey’s spending. A review of two programs — the federal Safe Routes to Schools program and the state Bikeways program — reveals that the state received nearly 10 times as many applications for funding from those two programs than it awarded.

In 2008 the state received 131 applications totaling more than \$35 million for the state’s Bikeways program. Yet the NJDOT Local Aid program awarded only 13 grants for \$3 million. This amounts to 10 percent of grants being approved for all or part of the amount requested and only 8.5 percent of the requested funding being granted, leaving a shortfall of more than \$32 million.

2008 Safe Routes to School funding has not yet been awarded. However, in 2007 the state received 274 applications totaling more than \$76 million for the federal program. Only 29 (11 percent) of those applications were approved. And the state granted only 5.5 percent of the requested funding, leaving a shortfall of \$72 million.

Because pedestrian and bicycle project funds are largely distributed through an application process, municipalities with the staff and resources to successfully complete the paperwork have a significant advantage over those that don’t. Beyond the hurdle of paperwork, federal funds typically require significant local matching funds. For the most part, this current process favors wealthier, suburban communities over cash-strapped cities.

For example, though the City of Newark suffered the highest number of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities in the state, it submitted only one application for the 2007 Safe Routes to School program and did not apply for state Bikeways funding. Newark’s \$250,000 request for a city-wide Safe Routes to School project was rejected by the NJDOT Local Aid office.



Likewise, NJDOT rejected all of the 2007 Safe Routes to Schools and 2008 Bikeways program applications submitted by the City of Elizabeth or Camden, also ranked at the top of New Jersey's municipalities in terms of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities.

Recommendations

- **Use the next reauthorization of the Transportation Trust Fund as an opportunity to increase funding for NJ Department of Transportation pedestrian and bicycle programs.** The recent NJDOT capital program shows a decline in bicycle and pedestrian funding despite an increased interest in car alternatives. Meanwhile, municipal and county demand for bicycling and pedestrian funding from the state far exceeds current funding levels. The state needs to boost bicycling and pedestrian funding so that it can meet at least half of the funding requests.
- **Develop a new “Safe Streets for Seniors” funding program aimed at improving pedestrian safety in places with high numbers of older adults.** With older New Jerseyans disproportionately represented among the state's pedestrian fatalities, NJDOT should create a new Safe Streets for Seniors funding program modeled after the federal Safe Routes to School program.
- **Target all bicycle and pedestrian funding to places with the highest number of pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and deaths.** The state should direct funding to the places where pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and fatalities are concentrated — typically in urban centers with high levels of foot and bicycle traffic.



The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit policy and advocacy organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly, and equitable transportation system in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.

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